

George P. Colt House  
628 1/2 East Sixth Street  
Erie  
Erie County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5359

HABS  
PA  
25-ERI,  
14-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Mid-Atlantic Region  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

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14-

GEORGE P. COLT HOUSE

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Location: 628½ East Sixth Street  
Erie  
Erie County  
Pennsylvania

USGS Erie North Quadrangle  
Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 17.576680.4664920

Present Owner: Edward M. Lenz  
2730 Euclid Avenue  
Erie, PA 16511

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The George Colt Mansion was the home of a prominent Erie banker from its completion in 1872 until his death in 1908. The owner was a member of a pioneering Erie family which settled in the region in 1795.

The house was designed as a country residence and was so situated to afford a commanding view of the surrounding farmland, and lake and harbor to the north. It represents an early yet imposing example of Second Empire architecture in Erie County.

PART I - HISTORICAL INFORMATION

One of the very first settlers in Erie County was Judah Colt, land agent for the Pennsylvania Population Company after 1797. In this capacity he was largely responsible for the early development of the area. Among those associated with him in his agency was a nephew, Thomas Colt, who later became burgess and the first mayor of the city of Erie in 1851.

George Pearson Colt, the son of Thomas, was born in Erie in 1834. At an early age he became a clerk in a local banking house, and later moved to Chicago where he continued his career in banking. In 1867 he returned to Erie and established a private banking firm in partnership with his father-in-law P. H. Ball. The firm of Ball & Colt was capitalized at \$50,000. It was closed upon Colt's death in 1908. At that time it was the only remaining private financial institution in the City.

Among the property which George Colt inherited from his father were several lots just outside the city limits on Erie's east side. It was on one of these lots that he began construction of his large country home in 1870. The size and workmanship of the house are confirmed in the fact that Colt's taxable base increased from \$4,550 to \$25,000 when the house was completed in 1872.

Unlike his father, Colt did not aspire to political office but preferred to devote all his energies to his banking business. Nonetheless he was a long-term member of the Board of Education, serving as its treasurer from 1878 until his death.

His professional career was aptly summarized in an editorial which appeared in the Erie Dispatch on June 6, 1908. It said (the) "city has lost a faithful and able citizen. As a banker he was careful, honest, and successful, and that fraternity has lost one of its most efficient advisers and staunchest supporters."

## PART II - DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The George Colt Mansion is a fine example of the "towered" Second Empire architectural style. While there are sufficient portions on the more important architectural elements left to make this judgement, the house is generally in extremely poor condition due to vandalism and fire.

The house is 2½ stories high and generally rectangular in shape, measuring 70' x 35'. The latter or front elevation (south side) is divided into four bays, one of which is the tower at the southeast corner.

The full basement is constructed of fieldstone faced with cement. Walls are double brick laid in common bond over balloon framing. The brick was at one time painted gray, but most of that has flaked off revealing the original red color. Two small porches on the east side and rear, which were added when the mansion was converted to rental housing after 1908, were subsequently removed. Only one of the original tall chimneys with its decorated cap, survived the recent fire.

Fenestration is extremely elaborate. Windows in the main part of the house which consists of identical east and west bays, are large and set-off by substantial eyebrow-like segmental hoods. Those in the rear wing feature keystone arches. All the original two-over-two light, double-hung sash is gone.

The modified Mansard roof (single pitch) is made of slate. It is punctured by seven dormers: four on the west side, one on the front elevation, and two on the east side. Four smaller dormers of similar design are set in the fourth story of the square tower. All dormers contain carved "bulls-eye" pediments and scrollwork at the base of the surrounds. This "bulls-eye" motif extends to windows in the first and second stories as well.

Original layout for interior spaces is difficult to determine due to extensive alteration and fire. It is still possible to reach the upper floors by two stairways. The wide central stairway is spiral in form and is made of black walnut wood. The balusters and newel posts no longer exist. Wall and ceiling finish is plaster throughout although a few traces of original wallpaper are exposed in one of the second floor rooms. Door and window trim, as well as flooring are all hardwood. No fixtures or hardware remain.

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The house as originally conceived stood on somewhat elevated land approximately halfway between two creeks. There were no other buildings in the immediate vicinity, which afforded uninterrupted views in all directions, particularly to the north across the Garrison Grounds once occupied by the old American blockhouse, and beyond to the entrance to the harbor. It was this dramatic vista which Colt may have had in mind when he incorporated the four story tower into his plans. The tower also looked down upon the long circular drive which entered from East Sixth Street and swept around the east side of the house to the stable in the rear.

Following Colt's death, in accordance with his instructions, all his real estate was sold and in 1910 the house along with the surrounding property passed into the hands of a local developer. By 1917 the block had been entirely built up, the Colt house itself sealed off from Sixth Street with only a narrow right-of-way access from Fifth Street. And so it has remained to this day, a mansion without the property and landscaping which made it an Erie landmark at the turn of the century.

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PART III - GRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Site Sketch. Insurance Maps of Erie, Pa. (New York:  
Sanborn Map Co., 1957), p. 302.

PART IV - SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Atlas of the City of Erie, Penna. (Philadelphia: A.H. Mueller & Co., 1900) Plate 15.

Atlas of the City of Erie, PA. and Adjoining Subdivisions (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller & Co., 1917), Plate 17.

History of Erie County Pennsylvania (Chicago: Warner, Beers & Co., 1884), p. 879.

Miller, John. A Twentieth Century History of Erie County Pennsylvania (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1909), Vol. I, p. 733; Vol. II, p. 104-105.

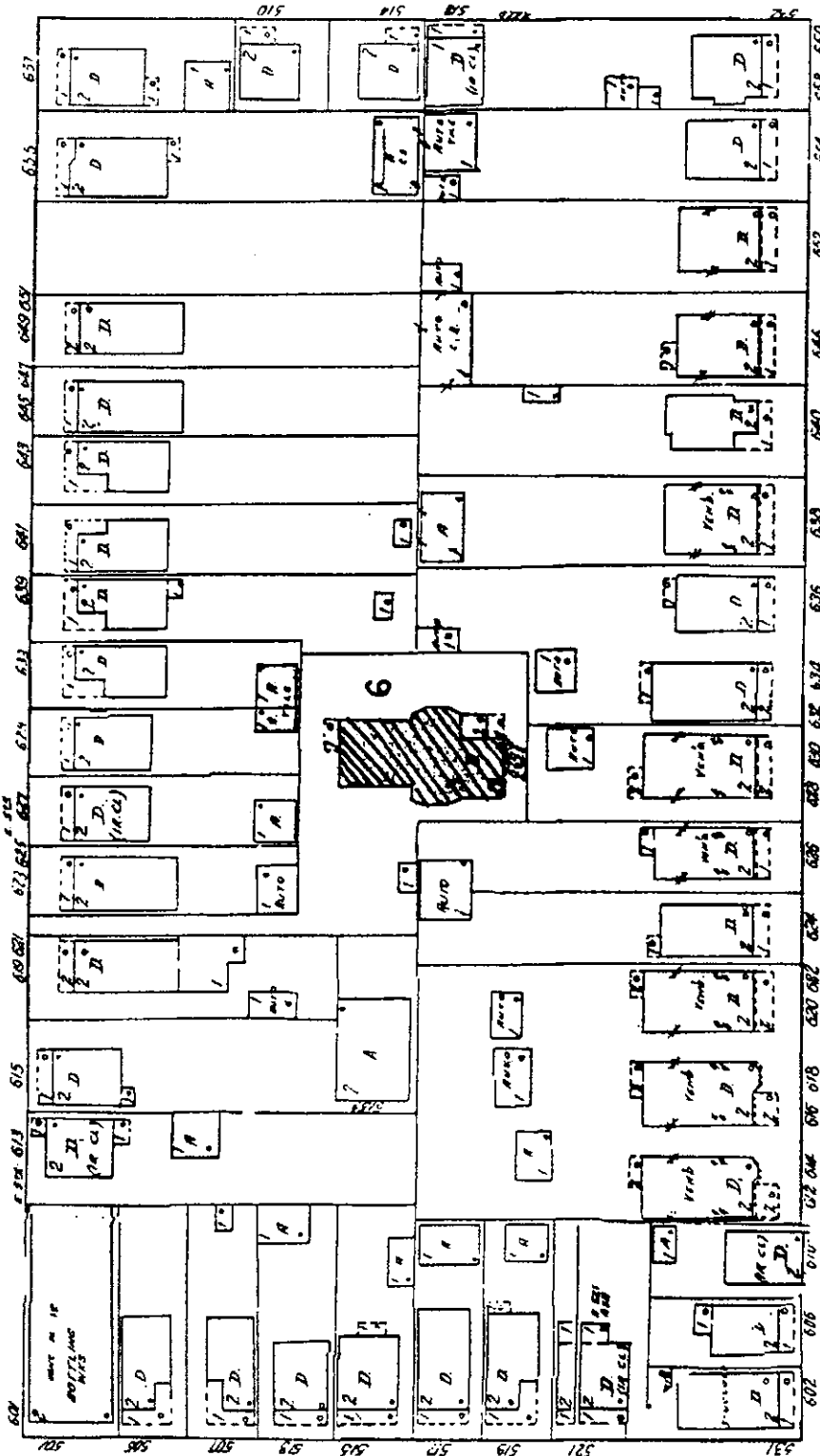
Erie Observer, 11 February, 1860

Erie Dispatch, 6 June, 1908

Deed, May 21, 1910, recorded in Volume 179, page 703.  
Recorder of Deeds Office, Erie County Court House.

Erie County Tax Records, 1870-71-72. Erie County Historical Society.

E. 5TH ST.



E. 6TH

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